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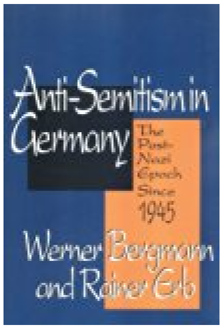

Anti-Semitism in Germany
The Post-Nazi Epoch Since 1945
Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb

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Measuring the Elusive

A German government publication of 1995, “The Federal Republic of Germany–Endangered by Right-Wing Extremism? ” confirmed the administration’s position that such extremism, neo-Nazism, and anti-Semitism, no longer posed significant threats to Germany. The article began with foreign observers’ opinions about the prospects for a free, democratic, “liberal society” in Germany after 1945. In that year, the report alleges, American sources classified a maximum of fifteen percent of the Germans as “Nazi sympathizers.” Such numbers served to bolster American policy and, by 1949, aided the creation of the image of a new Germany. In an odd twist in the overextended controversy about his book, Daniel Goldhagen, speaking to cheering German audiences (as opposed to hostilely brooding German academicians), declared that Germany, portrayed in *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* as fully imbued with anti-Semitic consciousness from at least the mid-nineteenth century–hopelessly and totally embroiled in visions of Jews as demons and evil incarnate–suddenly, in 1945, reversed itself. The anti-Semitism presumably consumed, if not through mothers’ milk, then through all German socio-cultural institutions, vanished because of the defeat. Thus Goldhagen, too, confirmed the Federal Republic of Germany’s position–then and now–that anti-Semitism had faded almost to nothing in the postwar years, leaving “no enduringly successful political movement” that could be classified as “right-wing extremist.”

In *Anti-Semitism In Germany: The Post-Nazi Epoch since 1945*, Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb note that four recent studies of German public opinion regarding Jews (1987, 1989, 1991, and 1992) identified approximately 15 percent of the population as “clearly anti-Semitic” (p. 6). Analysis of studies from the 1980s through 1992, including two of their own (1990 and 1991), lead them to report a steady decline of anti-Semitism and a corresponding growing rejection of Nazism in the Federal Republic. Although the authors are reluctant to offer a prognosis for the future, it seems at first glance, then, that little has changed as far as public opinion surveys are concerned. Yet, as this study of the continuities and discontinuities in German attitudes toward Jews unfolds, it reveals nuances and historical shifts determined by a wide array of variables. Addressing the complexities of the subject, *Anti-Semitism in Germany* provides valuable quantitative evidence for the evolution of German attitudes toward Jews; it is a history that charts variations–some surprising and some self-evident.

Bergmann and Erb represent a young generation of German social scientists, many of whom have worked at the Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism at the Technical University of Berlin[1] and at the Moses Mendelssohn Center of the University of Potsdam. Until now, their work has focused primarily on political aspects of anti-Semitism, tracing the connections between right-wing political groups and antipathy to Jews, relegating cultural and social aspects to secondary considerations. (Erb has elsewhere written on the subject of ritual murder.) This examination includes right-wing political movements in Germany, but the authors do not fasten on them exclusively or even principally. Their book comes at an auspicious time.

Given a rare opportunity to examine the attitudes of two population groups with a common history up to 1945, they have undertaken, in part, a comparative study of public opinion in eastern and western Germany from 1945 to 1995. Their principal questionnaire, borrowed from the 1987 survey conducted by the Institute for Public Opinion Research in Allensbach (Institut fuer Demoskopie, or IfD), poses rigorous and generative questions. Variables they consider in tracing the survival and development of anti-Semitic attitudes include generational patterns, economic and cultural influences, education, and gender and historical elements like the advent of the state of Israel and reactions to its history, (especially after 1967 when a significant anti-Zionist backlash began). Perhaps most telling, they have introduced a new category, "secondary anti-Semitism" derived from and connected to *Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung*, or coming to terms with the past--the Nazi past. This secondary anti-Semitism has been driven by new motives, less clearly racist or ideological, but highlighting the conflict between those who want to forget and those who insist on being reminded. All the conceptual variables are placed within the framework of German political culture and seem well conceived and reasonably grouped together to explain the diversity of factors in the history of popular anti-Semitism.

One of the more arresting aspects of the book is its attention to the history of public opinion surveys on this subject. Contrary to the official stance, the surveys taken by the Allied military authorities (OMGUS) between 1946 and 1949 revealed "massive persistence of anti-Semitism" attributable to specific historical, economic, and political circumstances like the presence of displaced persons, black marketeering (often by Jews), and controversies over restitution of Jewish property (p. 1). Numerous surveys that followed, conducted by the EMNID Institute and the IfD, among others, categorized roughly one-third of the western German population as openly anti-Semitic, one-third as "somewhat," and one-third as not anti-Semitic. This history reveals much about the nature of German opinions regarding Jews. The authors note that the social scientific "investigation of anti-Semitism has proceeded quite irregularly ... generally intensifying only when the situation demanded" (p. 25). A kind of stimulus-response evolved: an outburst of anti-Semitic acts like the wave of synagogue desecrations in 1959-60 seemed to generate a popular reaction as well as a spate of social scientific studies. The same held for public scandals like the invitation extended by Chancellor Helmut Kohl to Kurt Waldheim in the midst of the furor over his alleged anti-Semitic past, or the Bitburg fiasco, or the planned performance of Rainer Fassbinder's overtly anti-Semitic play "The City, Garbage, and Death." Each stimulated a surprising public reaction followed by more surveys. The same pattern occurred in the aftermath of the Eichmann trial of 1961 and the Auschwitz trials of 1963-65, and again in 1992, following a series of anti-foreigner and anti-Semitic riots in several cities in Germany.

A dramatic increase in public knowledge about the Holocaust proved to be an unexpected result of these events. The authors perceive a clear pattern accompanying their enumeration of anti-Semitic incidents from the 1950s to the 1990s: "a growing gap between public opinion on the one hand, and the media and politics in and outside the country on the other" (pp. 18, 299-302). In short, tolerance of overt, virulent, and public anti-Semitism has steadily declined, matched by sometimes controversial debates over punishment for anti-Semitic acts, and has served to suppress open expression of anti-Semitism. Already in then-chancellor Konrad Adenauer's 1951 Bundestag address on "the Federal Republic's attitude towards the Jews," what would become a consistent administration strategy began to emerge:

> The Federal government and the great majority of the German people are deeply aware of the immeasurable suffering endured by the Jews of Germany and by the Jews of the occupied territories during the period of National Socialism. The great majority of the German people did not participate in the crimes committed against the Jews, and wish to express their abhorrence of these crimes ... In our name, unspeakable crimes were committed and they demand restitution, both moral and material, for the persons and properties of the Jews who have been so seriously harmed.

Adenauer announced that any anti-Semitic agitation would be severely punished and declared that the Federal government and the overwhelming majority of the German people detested the crimes of the Nazi regime, and he dedicated himself, the government and the people to "making things right" (*Wiedergutmachung*). And here is Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1986, addressing the Bundestag: "the huge majority of our fellow citizens in the Federal Republic, especially the younger generation, is immune to anti-Semitism" (p. 19). The Chancellor dismissed the wave of anti-Semitic occurrences that had prompted the Green Party, the SPD and the FDP to demand a public debate, as "isolated incidents." Bergmann and Erb perceive this trend as engendering a private or "secondary anti-Semitism," which remains "communicatively latent." This may be the most significant and provocative aspect of the work. While anti-Semitism has increasingly been denied a "public stage" (literally in cases like the Fassbinder production), there seems to have been a corresponding increase at the private or personal level.

Difficult to quantify, the flashpoint for this development, the authors contend, has been the demand for *Schlusstrich*, an end to discussion of the past, along with the concomitant demand for "normalization" or the establishment of a "normal" relationship with Jews and Israel. This "normalcy" translates into an end to reparations, to the "special relationship" with Israel that had been determined by guilt and restitution. As late as 1989 some 46 percent of respondents in an EMNID survey believed that reparations paid to Jews and/or to Israel were either too high or should cease altogether. Bergmann and Erb conclude that "present-day anti-Semitism in the Federal Republic of Germany is essentially tied to memories of Nazism, feelings of guilt, and the desire to end discussion of the past and return to normalcy." Their work, therefore, seeks to measure the "transformation and changes in the content of anti-Semitic prejudice, as well as the special, communicative latency of anti-Semitism today and the difference between private prejudices and public opposition to anti-Semitism." They have thus uncovered fundamental differences between antagonisms to other ethnic groups and Jews, emphasizing that "current relations between Germans and Jews exist in the shadow of the Holocaust, and do not possess the structure common to competing ethnic groups" (p. 29).

This may be rather surprising to sociologists and social psychologists who have drawn fundamental analogies between anti-Jewish and anti-foreign resentment. From this study's unique vantage point of examining both east and west Germans comes yet another possible surprise. While the variables of age, education, and political orientation are the major factors influencing the nature and degree of anti-Semitic sentiment in both parts of Germany, the authors discovered that hostile attitudes toward Jews declined more sharply in the former GDR than in the FRG. Given that postwar goals of re-education first announced by Adenauer in 1951 were pursued vigorously in the West, this phenomenon raises some fundamental questions about the nature and success of that educational enterprise.

The authors offer three possible answers to why the East seemed to have achieved a relatively better record. First, the anti-fascist dogma of Communist East Germany may have been able to eradicate prejudice more effectively than the free-wheeling exchange of ideas in a democratic society like the Federal Republic. Second, official state doctrine in the East declared fascism a product of capitalism and exonerated its population from historical responsibility for Nazism. This may explain the results of the survey that indicated fewer feelings of guilt and responsibility in eastern Germany than in the FRG. That would, given the thesis of "secondary anti-Semitism," eliminate a significant motive for postwar anti-Semitism. Third, the authors suggest that the "psychoanalytic model" of "working through" may not apply to societies as a whole. In the East, the utter condemnation of fascism effectively precluded any discussion of anti-Semitic ideas or of Jews in any context. In the West, the educational process involved intense, ongoing historical debates on the nature and history of Nazism in schools and in public life. This entailed, like it or not, the airing and reiteration of anti-Jewish stereotypes and anti-Semitic ideas (pp. 305-6, 313-17).

Having traced the history of public attitudes toward Jews and anti-Semitism, the authors introduced new indices to measure private attitudes more closely. They conclude, qualifying and adding appropriate admissions of some randomness in terms of boundaries and categories, that while anti-Semitism remains in Germany today, it exists "only in ideological fragments and as personal prejudice." It remains, in other words, disorganized and dependent on "an individual's active receptivity; outside of a right-wing extremist context, it is no longer accepted as an integral component of other political or ideological orientations" (p. 314). This "highly individualized" anti-Semitism, stands in sharp contrast to its historical antecedents, especially in the Weimar Republic.

In a sort of quantitative tour de force, integrating political, gender, age, education, and social psychological variables, Bergmann and Erb have produced a model of quantitative social scientific research and analysis. The book includes four extensive appendices: "Problems in the Development of Anti-Semitic Scales," the "Questionnaire and Basic Count," "Factor Analyses," and the "AS-Stereotype Index" which details the seventeen "indicators" of anti-Semitic attitudes. A bibliography includes an exhaustive list of previous survey research as well as a thorough section on history and theory. There are some minor problems with translation, mainly grammatical and syntactical errors, perhaps not enough attention to German Jewish historical development and the carryover from pre-Holocaust attitudes. But primarily, the concentration on the increasing discontent of more Germans with the expansive attention paid to the history of the Holocaust raises disturbing questions left unexplored in this work.

Secondary anti-Semitism offers a distressing set of emerging possibilities. Rather than ideological, religious, or racist ideology, Bergmann and Erb have suggested a set of rational motivations for animosity toward Jews. Whether economic (reparations steal from Germans and support older Jewish stereotypes), or social (we have had enough of the past) or psychological (it is not our guilt or our shame) or intellectually pragmatic (what good does continued discussion of the Holocaust and the Third Reich do?), the origins of latent anti-Semitism that derive from the insistent memory of the Holocaust now seem rational. *Bewaeltigung*, mastering more than "coming to terms with" the past, here shades into borderline denial, which itself seems derivative of latent hostility to Jews. In a powerful essay that covers the same material as this book, "Jews in the Minds of Germans in the Postwar Period," Frank Stern posed the German question: why continue to be plagued by Auschwitz? He addressed some of the same negative incidents as Bergmann and Erb–the Waldheim visit, Bitburg, the refusal to acknowledge Germany's responsibility to Jews in the unification treaty of 1990, for example–and attributed them to the phenomenon of a "newly developing German historical consciousness." That new identity places "normalization" high on the agenda.

If, as Friedrich Nietzsche noted, the Germans always have been more compulsively preoccupied with national identity than any other national group, then that preoccupation has suffered from the miasma of Nazism, with Auschwitz as its most debilitating symptom–an infection that many of Bergmann and Erb's respondents seem to feel refuses to heal because of a persistent strain of malevolent reminders of the past. Indeed, as Stern pointed out, even Adenauer shared a more political approach to the question of a proper German posture toward Jews and Jewish suffering, revealed in remarks he made after he left office: "[the crimes] had to be expiated ... if we wished once more to gain respect and standing among the world's nations. However the power held by the Jews, even today, especially in America, should not be underestimated."

How, then, forge a new identity that will not abandon the old? How accomplish this when, as this book makes patently clear, anti-Semites share with a far larger segment of the population the "complex set of motifs" that include "guilt, shame, and awkwardness"? That ensemble is "a result of inadequate attempts to deal with a criminal national past," of incompletely addressing the past–a failure "to come to terms" with it. The ambiguously measured consequence revealed both empirically and intuitively is that "[w]hen Jews are spoken of in Germany or when German-Jewish-Israeli conflicts surface, this almost always occurs in conjunction with efforts to deal with the Nazi past, the Holocaust and its consequences" (p. 314).

In stark contrast to the public censure, then, private "public opinion" remains problematic. In October 1996, the Members' Assembly of the Project "Against Forgetting–For Democracy" in Frankfurt am Main, issued a resolution concerning "Combating neo-Nazi agitation in the Federal Republic of Germany emanating from the USA." With justifiable pride, the Assembly applauded the Hamburg District Court decision sentencing Gary Lauck, an American citizen, to four years imprisonment for "popular incitement and arousal of racial hatred." Lauck advocated a view of the world, the resolution states, that included glorification of Hitler, the regret of the fall of "Aryandom," a conspiratorial capitalist Jewry, denial of the Holocaust, and the declaration that the Third Reich "dealt much too humanely with the Jews." The resolution also deplored the refusal of the United States to concur with the decision or to contravene the activities of Lauck. "Fortunately, the majority of the American population, just like the German population, has decided that this view of the world is not socially acceptable and that it has no value." The resolution continued that the leadership in this combat had to come "from the citizens themselves" and recognized that different histories produced different attitudes. Yet the members went on record as refraining from "stating whether there might also be good reason in the U.S. to penalize such statements that go so far as to call for committing murder." The irony of this phenomenon ought not be lost and makes the event thick with implications. Now, after Bergmann and Erb's study, it has been overlaid yet again with troubling and perplexing information. With a new "rational" tone, anti-Semitism paradoxically may become more enigmatic. For all the current discussion about rational or understandable anti-Semitism, it is fundamentally irrational, an essentially stupid choice made by ignorant people, as Jean Paul Sartre argued in "Portrait of the Anti-Semite" (*Partisan Review*, 1946).

Perhaps equally irrational, if "understandable," however, is American novelist Don Delillo's cryptic comment in *White Noise*, a book about death and therefore appropriately including Nazism, that “when it comes to things German … in the end is Hitler, of course.”

Notes:

[1]. Editor’s note: H-Antisemitism’s home page <`http://www.h-net.msu.edu/~{}antis/` `$>$` now has a link to the Zentrum fuer Anti-Semitismusforschung. Its direct URL is: `http://www.tu-berlin.de/~{}zfa/`

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